



Speech by Ambassador Ole Egberg Mikkelsen at the Human Rights Legion Forum

Mr. Ombudsman, Mr. Ambassador, Dear UNDP-colleagues, dear human rights activists

First of all, I wish to thank UNDP for inviting me to deliver opening remarks this morning on the occasion of the human rights legion conference.

It is organized by the ombudsman and supported by Japan and Denmark through the UNDP.

Let me thank the entire UNDP-team for the good work you are doing and for inviting me as a donor representative to give visibility to Denmark's contribution.

Denmark is a long-term supporter of Ukraine's ombudsman through the UNDP. We are not least supporting the regional offices of the ombudsman. We are doing this in order to ensure access to the ombudsman for citizens across the nation, not least because of decentralization of powers to regional and local authorities.

Our support for the ombudsman-institution is part of our program for civic society and human rights. There is a new program in place for the years 2023-26 with an overall budget of 6 million Euro.

Some people might ask why Denmark is supporting the ombudsman at a time when Ukraine finds itself in an epic battle for survival as a nation. Is that a luxury in times of war? Would it be better simply to give more weapons to support Ukraine's armed struggle and then deal with human rights after the victory?

Denmark is indeed supplying weapons to Ukraine. Since the full scale Russian aggression, Denmark's total support for Ukraine amounts to 1.5 billion Euro. More than two thirds are weapons and defense equipment.

The reason is very simple: Ukraine's struggle is also our struggle and your freedom is also our freedom. So we have to support your armed struggle as much as we can.

Ukraine's struggle is indeed a struggle for survival as a nation. It is however also a struggle for the values that we share. Freedom, liberty, democracy and human rights are the common values that unites Danes and Ukrainians.

These values are also our common European values. Just last week we celebrated the 30 years' anniversary of the Copenhagen criteria. These are the rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the European Union.

The criteria require inter alia that a state has the institutions to preserve democratic governance and human rights.

This includes of course the ombudsman. I was happy to see that Ukraine's deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Ms. Olga Stefanishyna delivered the key note speech in Copenhagen on that occasion.

Ms. Stefanishyna reaffirmed Ukraine's unwavering support for the European values that we share and for which Ukraine is fighting on the battlefield.

That is the reason why Denmark is also supporting the Ombudsman and the important work that you are doing. Human rights are indeed worth fighting for.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Lubinets for the sterling work you and your team are doing in wartime conditions under very difficult circumstances. I am particularly impressed by your work to protect the Human Rights of children.

Last week I visited the new Center for Protection of Children's Rights, that works under your auspices and I heard your account of the terrible price that Ukrainian children are paying for Russia's aggression.

Let me take this opportunity to assure you that Denmark will do what we can to ensure that the perpetrators of the heinous crimes committed against Ukrainian children will be brought to justice.

Denmark is a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This Court will play a key role in the massive work to ensure justice for victims in Ukraine.

Denmark is also an active member of the so-called core group of nations exploring potential mechanisms for prosecuting the crime of aggression against Ukraine. In Ukraine, we support civil society's crucial work on the ground for accountability and documentation of war crimes.

Denmark will also send a team of investigators to Ukraine to support ongoing investigation of war crimes in the autumn 2023.

The reason is very simple: Without justice and accountability, victory will be incomplete.

Finally let me remind you that this year we are not only celebrating the 30 years of the Copenhagen criteria this year. We are also celebrating the 75 years of the universal declaration of human rights.

Let me quote from the preamble: "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

These words are as valid today as they were when they were drafted 75 years ago. The anniversary will be marked in Copenhagen where national human rights institutions will gather on the invitation of the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The meeting will have a strong focus on the fight against torture, including in times of war. Unfortunately, the Russian inflicted horrors we have seen in for instance Bucha and Irpin, less than 20 kilometers from here, demonstrates that this is a strong need to focus on the fight against torture, including in times of war.

Mr. Lubinets, I hope to see you in Copenhagen on that occasion. Your institution will have important insight to share.

I wish you a productive conference.

Kyiv, 7th of July 2023